THE MEASURE
A JOURNAL OF POETRY

Poems by Joseph Auslander, Gwendolen Haste, Beatrice Ravenel, Robert J. Roe, Marie Luhrs, Dare Stark, and others – – – – – – –

Padraic Colum's New Book Reviewed – – – –

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Brown Magic: Sonnet in B

THERE is a magic neither black nor white,
But brown and meshed as dead twigs in a wood
Where pines have stood as centuries have stood
In needle-earth pricked brittle as with blight.
They strain brown sunshine criss-cross through, at night
Brown stars, in baffling glow not understood;
Bewildered human hands, protesting, could
Not brush that bright confusion from the sight.

Being so blinded I can never see,
When into that enchantment I'm betrayed,
Whence comes its color, what its claim may be;
My brooding explanation must be made
In braided words and shattered simile
Of broken twig-mist, brilliant amber shade.

—*Louise Townsend Nicholl.*

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Winter Fear

ALWAYS I will be followed by the cautious insistent leaves;
Autumn will shadow me across the wind-streaked hills;
Always a lank blue heron will shift out of the north
When the river chills
And the hounds of the frost go forth.

There will be time, later, to burrow in and sleep:
Not now when the poplars wrap their nerves against the bite
And snarl of the jagged gusts. Not now. Later, I know,
There will come the white
Dead hours of sleep and snow

And the incessant staggering of bitter swift green dusk
Under the fusilade of sleet; the bludgeoning dark
Beating the gaunt horizon down in a blind rage of stars! . . .
O I know his mark
And the welt of his branding-bars!

I hate him.. . . If only I could fight off that dull
Odour of sleep! If only I could fight it off!
That creeping smell of the frost settling down like a hood . . .
Like a long hard cough . . .
If . . . if . . . only . . . I could . . . !

—Joseph Auslander.

The Disillusioned

THEY call us cold and proud
That are humble and passionate
And cynical
That are wistful to believe . .
Who was it
Robbed us of our Gods?

It is true we will not clothe us
In rags and tatters
And we go bare of illusions.
Are not our young bodies
Beautiful and strange?

We are the true humble
That go making a new testament,
Forming a new covenant . . . .
Deny us not.

—Robert J. Roe.

Love's Humility

I cannot remember you
After you go.
I hold you as the poplar holds the storm
That turns it to beautiful tumult
And covers the glint of its leaves
With abashed white eyelids.

—Beatrice Ravenel

Prayer of the Homesteader

DEAR Lord, we are afraid.
We do not know this land.
These mountains are too cold and tall and bare,
Within their flanks the gray wolf has his lair.
Safety lay thick upon the fields
And friendly hill tops of our youth.
Lord, you will understand
We are not cowards
But we do not like this land.

We were taught simple things when we were young.
We know the path a plow makes in black loam,
The way of pleasant showers on April days,
The soft winds of our home.
We know the healing rains of summer nights,
And the gold plenty of the harvesting.
But this land fights,
Its hard brown sod protests against the plow,
Its stubborn grasses cling.
Our young crops are beat flat by roaring hail,
And when the rains should visit us in spring
There comes a hot strange gale,
Like desert wind blown over glittering sand,
That dries the little wheat.
Lord, did you mean that men should farm this land?

Lord, this is not a land where men should live.
Our minds rake up a harvest of old tales
Whispered around old fires,
And butte and coulee ring with chattering wails.
Upon these iron benches Things have stalked.
When morning breaks we are afraid to look
For fear great feet have walked
And left crushed tracks upon the buffalo grass.

These creeping nights of ghosts were never made
For man and sleep.
Dear Lord, we are afraid.

Lord, can it be that this is not your land?
Your ways are peaceful ways through country lanes,
But you have never walked upon these plains,
We never see your face beneath these skies.
Come to us, Lord;
Man should not live alone within the world,
He is not strong or wise.
Bless our thin crops,
Teach the small trees to grow.
Stretch us your kindly hand.
We must have comfort in this alien land.

—Gwendolen Haste

Garden Peace

THE tall Sun is a traveller.
My small heart has no peace
In thinking of the gleaming world
Spread for his Odysseys.
Still when His road is bound in cloud
On my short paths I go
Intimate with the roots of things
The Sun shall never know.

—Dare Stark.

Sky Line

A WORKMAN climbed a lofty tower,
None beside him being able;
Gripped and struggled half an hour
Binding up a broken cable;
Paused to glimpse the toy-house town,
Spat, swung outward and came down.

Interruption

FIVE men lean on a sunny wall,
Watching the sea; two of them call
A bit of news to the other three
Who turn for a moment, then watch the sea.

Woodcraft

A TREE
Of slender beauty and graceful bearing,
At the edge of a clearing,
Beckoned to me
As I was nearing
The place where it stood;
However, through fearing
The mood and intention
So deep in the wood —
Whose kind I'll not mention,
I turned quickly back, disappearing;
For one may not reckon
With trees when they beckon.

—Prescott Hoard.

Strange Laughter

TO anyone who breaks her crystal mirror
I would say this—Through the unlucky years
She will be a whirligig in seven different windows
Frantic with the tinkle of her own glass tears.

Between the seventh winter's end and the first lucky springtime,
She will be so tired that she will be so still,
That even through the clash and confusion of freshets
She will hear a seed in the hill.

She will have a glance, by then, even for puddles,
In their common sincerities, grey and brown,
She will see the quizzical reflection
Of a world and a woman, upside down.

Open Grave

OVER my heart's country your heart may fare—
Into each rickety tavern where dark tiles
Cry for your candles, through the cross-shaped stiles
To those pathetic acres, ribbed and bare,
That wait your winged plough; from hills, whose air
Is desolate for your balsam, down the miles
Of dune and sandbar, seaward, where lone spiles
Pause in the water, wistful for your repair.

But the one field where treacherous, tall grain
Supports shrill birds, where lustrous poppies toss
In madness—oh abandon, lest you see
What is so richly buried there in vain,
Knock up with clicking knuckles his black cross—
The restless body of my enemy.

White Death

YOU are like snow, I think—
Not snow that catches fire and crackles,
And snaps whole trees in, link by link,
Till twigs can't turn without the clink
Of little iridescent shackles—

That hurts, that keeps awake—
This is soft snow, white lashes tangling
Over closed eyes, each gentle flake
A light, light finger that will make,
In time, the heavy hand for strangling.

No cries for help will sound
In snow like this, but deeper, deeper
Smother. Not even faintly found
Shall be white breath, a white mound
All that remains to mark the sleeper.

Hunting Dogs

NO other animal, not dog nor bull,
Could be more noble or more beautiful
Than these, who are more courteous than people
Whose heads are higher and whose bodies ripple
More silkily than any of their kind.
No other dogs so tensely take the wind
As these, who stretch their long necks on the air
As if on water; so weedily the hair
Fringes each tail, floats from each delicate limb,
So hard they breathe and stare, they seem to swim.

And, swiftness softened, muscles at their ease,
When one of them, with gentle hope to please,
Trots quaintly up, and, with a humorous grace,
Drops on my hands the velvet of his face,

The petals of his ears and tongue, I lack
All hateful thoughts—Surely the howling pack
    Is not of these; surely no terrible trouble
    Was ever sought for wild things in the stubble
By eyes so tender; never, through such soft breath,
Flashed, like man's steel, the savage teeth of death.

—Winifred Welles.

Building Operations

ACROSS the street tan bricks are being laid,
And down the street the weighted wagons go
Dark smoke and dust are reaching for the skies
And smudging carelessly the lucent day;
Always my ears are beaten by the cries
Of workmen quarreling about their pay;
And out of all this labor will be made
A few more long, lean houses in a row.

I tell you that the rattle and the grind
In this one stony street have made me think
Much on the ugliness that I must find
Who love a pointed moon, grass at the brink
Of water; and on the quieted mind
That I shall have when into death I sink.

—Marie Luhrs.

Three Crows

GO by, three crows, go by, go by—
Inky sunlight on your wings;
And I will watch you as you fly
And not think of unlikely things.

Go by, and I will watch you go—
A quiver of dark hurting the blue;
And if I care no one would know
From the way I look at you.

I will watch you disappear,
Crying your way into the south,
Even though the wind comes near
And touches me upon the mouth.

I will watch though sunlight lies
Warm as breath across my face,
Holding nothing in my eyes
But three crows flying into space.

Nausea

SOMEWHERE under this fuming sky,
Somewhere off in that dizzying space,
He moves and breathes and looks at the sun;
And the same light falls on my face.

Where the horizon breaks into mist
And wild wings fly over shadowy lands,
He sleeps behind the sickening wind;
Yet the same dark covers our hands.

Riddance

NOW all my longing is in my hands.
I have cleaned my mind and I am through
With aching thought that understands
Nothing at all but the need of you.

Only my hands remember now.
My hands are like two leaves that cling
Desperately to a broken bough,
And think of sun, and think of spring.

Then there is only one thing to do:
I'll throw away what will never be missed,
And be completely rid of you
When I break my two hands off at the wrist.

—Annie Higgins.

On a Young Thing

IF she is dreamy and does not attend
To all the wants of love, O let her be.
She walks within a dream without an end
And sees the world not as her elders see.

Look where she lies at dusk among the roses
Watching the moon climbing the bent oak boughs.
To her shy eyes that golden rind encloses
The high unripened fruit of lovers' vows.

She hears the acorns dropping on the grass,
Drowsily lifts one, stares at its brown dome.
She knows not yet the law by which they pass,
Ripe nuts or thistle-down, to a new home.

She is so much a child that the one thing
She knows of pain is of a black bee's sting.

—Dorothy E. Collins.

Return

HIS white feet paused
At the river's rim;
Its liquid silver depth
Looked up at him.

Not an aspen moved,
Nor twig made quiver—
He was carved in the living hush
Of the lighted river.

Two star-beams burned
In his eyeless eyes—
He was one with the curious stones
That stared at the skies.

As straight as a mountain-eagle
Cleaving the twilight-gloom,
His poor, white feet, remembering,
Had called him home,

To the lighted river,
In the heart of the singing lands,
To hold the moon of his boyhood
In his lifeless hands.

—J. Corson Miller.

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ACTING EDITOR: KENNETH SLADE ALLING

ASSISTANT EDITOR: WINIFRED WELLES

Declaration

THERE is none of the poetry of Emily Dickinson, even the most casual jottings, that does not show the depth and incandescence of her soul. The form is sometimes exasperating. But do men complain finding rare sea gems in containers harsh and crabbed to the outward view?

If the general world held poetry in adequate regard, how would all the later brood of April fakirs be confounded by the songs that spring put forth in her? But she needed no season; the abysmal rhythms stirred her always; the rhythms of life and the rhythms of death.

Her work, that has for its subject dissolution, seems to move as in the sepulchral light that goes before those New England storms.

That she was never facile we praise God and open any one of the four small volumes to read at random

> And we, we placed the hair,
> And drew the head erect;
> And then an awful leisure was
> Our faith to regulate.

And those stanzas of molten ecstacy

> I taste a liquor never brewed. . .

How nicely this would fit some of the tremendous transients in the contemporary eye

I'm nobody—

How dreary to be somebody!
How public like a frog
To tell your name the livelong day
To an admiring bog.

Simple, as tears are simple, this of the westing sun

But how he set, I know not.
There seemed a purple stile
Which little yellow boys and girls
Were climbing all the while.

Till when they reached the other side
A dominie in gray
Put gently up the evening bars
And led the flock away.

This is Solitude

There is a solitude of space,
A solitude of sea,
A solitude of death, but these
Society shall be,
Compared with that profounder site,
That polar privacy,
A soul admitted to Itself,
Finite infinity.

When winter has gone, in the new sunlight

Nicodemus' mystery
Receives its annual reply.

Her poems might be termed sublime whimsies furbished with a fine almost gossamer severity only that there is innate in many something profoundly austere and even terrible.

They tremble nearer the verge of that vast disclosure that never can be disclosed than any before or since written on this continent.

She is never obscure, but there is a golden ambiguity about her. She is like a sculptor that has for his block eternity and can with his human limitations hollow out but a few crudely vivid features, the faint adumbration of his idea.

She never mated in the flesh or only in immaculate intimacy, but every hour must have consummated some marriage of her spirit. She belongs to that exceeding few who are of the aristocracy of time.

Kenneth Slade Alling.

The Going of the Old Ireland

Dramatic Legends and Other Poems, by Padraic Colum. The Macmillan Co., New York.

AS one watches the new volumes of bad verse accumulate on a desk like dropping leaves, the conviction that this is no day for poetry becomes so settled that to look into a new collection is a dismal task, to be put off as long as possible. The poets seem to have forgotten the way to go about making verses, and no wonder, for there are few readers and practically no readers looking for what it is the great mission of poetry to give. Exaltation is a thing of which Americans are ashamed, much as they are ashamed of being drunk or wildly in love. This may be true of Europeans also, now. I don't know Europe. But assuredly there have been ages and nations in Europe that were ashamed of none of these. To be drunk, to be wildly in love or to find exaltation in song or story, came as habitually to them as to be born or grow old.

Padraic Colum writes out of the knowledge of a countryside that had not been tarred with the industrial stick when he grew up in it. His work is good because it has the flavor in it of a naive and passionate peasant culture. Where it is not so good it is overlaid with the sentimentalization of a bright, vicious and mechanical civilization—this democracy in which we live.

In *Dramatic Legends and Other Poems,* there are poems that might have been set down before modern invention was discovered in America and then made its way in a plague of transport, communication and factories through all the tradition-haunted shadows of the Old World, levelling as it went, and turning out young men and maidens as much alike and as artificial as clothes pins. There is, at any rate, one such poem here—"Gilderoy":

> The Smith who made the manacles,
> With bar and bolt, and link and ring,
> Sang out above his hearty blows—
> "I can't have grief for everything."
>
> As Roger by the rope-walk went
> The bramble-bird cheeped up to sing;
> He cut the wanted coil, and said—
> "I can't have grief for everything."
>
> The Lad who came to Ladder Lane,
> And saw his bemp cravat a-string—
> "Jack's doom's Jill's dole, but then," said he,
> "I can't have grief for everything."

And I who carried bag and wig,
Looked up and saw him turn and swing;
The dog he gave fixed eyes on me—
Can I have grief for everything?

Here is "Legend", with its "herd-boy in the rain", and the magic of the last lines:

The dooms they met are in
The song my grand-dam sings.

Here is "Men on Islands", a bit of pure music, and having for a subject this very passing of all that was unique and legendary which has been brought home to us by all Dubliners, from Synge to the least, because they still have a glimpse of what it is we have all lost. The same theme, mystically treated, wells up in the tenth part of "Reminiscences"

An old man said: "I saw
The chief of the things that are gone;
A stag with head held high,
A doe, and a fawn;

"And they were the deer of Ireland
That scorned to breed within bound:
The last; they left no race
Tame on a pleasure ground.

"A stag, with his hide all rough
With the dew, and a doe and a fawn;
Nearby, on their track on the mountain
I watched them, two and one,

"Down to the Shannon going—
Did its waters cease to flow,
When they passed, they that carried the swiftness,
And the pride of long ago?

"The last of the troop that had heard
Finn's and Oscar's cry;
A doe and a fawn, and before,
A stag with head held high!"

This, the most perfect and poignant lyric in the book, embodies Mr. Colum's spirit most closely. He has himself seen the old Ireland going the way of all modern nations. He clings to it, nevertheless, as to the spirit of poetry, for when it is gone poetry goes also.

—*Maxwell Anderson.*

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